

## The Challenges of Interdependence

This year, the Islamic holiday of Eid al Adha coincides with the American holiday of Thanksgiving. For both Muslims and Americans, this will be a time to give thanks for the blessings that have been bestowed upon us and to reflect on the sacrifice that has made our good fortune possible.

The world of today is becoming a smaller and smaller place. Technology is breaking down barriers and increasing the speed at which people, goods and ideas move from one place to another. There is not a country in the world that can isolate itself from what's going on around it.

Bahrain has experienced this global interdependence in a very real and tangible way over the last several months. The financial crisis in the United States has led to falling real estate prices, collapse of financial institutions and pressure on capital markets here. The H1N1 crisis, which began in Mexico, quickly spread around the world and forced Bahrain to close its schools for months. The internet is a world without borders and the threat posed to Bahrain by dissidents who use it to promote sectarianism caused the authorities to cut off access to sites all over the world.

Interdependence is a fact of life in the modern world and it affects all of us everywhere. It doesn't matter if a country is big or small, rich or poor, strong or weak. Each in some way is going to be affected by what happens in the other.

In some ways, interdependence can be a force for good. In other ways, it can present new dangers. For example, the increase in global trade has lifted more people out of poverty in the last 20 years than ever before. That is a good thing. On the other hand, the gap between rich and poor has also grown wider than ever before. Half the world's population -- 3 billion people -- lives on less than \$2 per day. This is a problem we must solve.

A smaller world brings people together, yet it also creates new tensions. The challenge of interdependence is to minimize its negative consequences and maximize its potential for positive change.

Consider for example the environment. One billion people today don't ever get a clean glass of water. In this region, water is a strategic commodity. Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Israel depend on rapidly depleting rivers and lakes for their national survival. Population growth, decreased rainfall and sub-optimal water use are all putting growing pressures on this increasingly scarce resource. Or take fish stocks, for example, something that is an essential part of Bahrain's history and economy. Ninety percent of the world's major fishing areas are now under-stocked. The pressures on our environment and global infrastructure are unsustainable over the long-term, and if not properly managed will be destabilizing.

Trans-national threats are made all the more dangerous by technology and the porousness of borders and the ease of communication. Terrorist networks, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and drug and human trafficking all benefit from a faster more accessible internet and larger, more complex transportation networks. The attack a few weeks ago by terrorists on what was reported to be a Pakistani nuclear site is a reminder there are people out there who are making determined and increasingly sophisticated attempts to cause catastrophic damage. And their mission is made easier by global interdependence.

We need to realize that we're all in this together. No nation can afford to stick its head in the sand. The fact of the matter is that my neighbor's problem is my problem, and everybody is my neighbor. Over the last ten years, for example, the United States has tripled its development assistance to Africa, because we recognized famine, disease and deprivation in the developing world will eventually undermine our own security and prosperity.

Second, collective action is required to manage these challenges. They are simply too big and too complex for any one nation or limited group of states to manage on their own. Take for example the global financial crisis. In London this June and then again in Pittsburgh this September, it was agreed that the best way to manage the crisis was through the broader and more inclusive G-20, rather than the G-8. In confronting the threat of nuclear proliferation, President Obama signaled the importance of collective action by being the first U.S. President to chair a meeting of the UN Security Council, where he presented his proposals for an enhanced international non-proliferation regime.

Third, the world has got to become more energy efficient. We cannot go on consuming fossil fuels at current rates. It is expensive, inefficient and unsustainable. The future belongs to those societies that innovate and expand the use of green technology. Thomas Friedman writes that "the next great global industry is going to be energy technology based on clean power and energy efficiency. ... And the country that invents and deploys the most energy technology will enjoy the most economic security, energy security, national security, innovative companies and global respect."

Take Denmark, for example, a small country of 5 million. Their economy has grown fifty percent over the last few years with zero increase in energy use. Not one more watt of electricity. Think what that would mean for an economy like Bahrain's, which is heavily resource dependent: lower utility costs, decreased public spending, increased productivity, more jobs and greater innovation.

The people of Bahrain and the United States have much to be thankful for this holiday season. We live in countries that are blessed with natural resources, talented citizens and responsible leaders. Long periods of peace have allowed us to prosper. For this, we should be grateful. But we should also remember that there are many who are not so fortunate. Let us

think of them at this time. In this small world, their plight is our plight and we must work together so that all of us can have a brighter future.